

Core Team Committee Meeting
State Resource Strategy Meeting
March 9, 2010
Fernan Forest Service Ranger Station
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Attendees

Coeur d'Alene/Fernan Ranger Station:

- Steve Kimball, Idaho Department of Lands
- Dave Stephenson, Idaho Department of Lands
- Craig Glazier, Forest Service, Idaho Panhandle National Forest
- Bob Helmer, Idaho Department of Lands
- Tera R. King, Northwest Management
- Ara Andrea, NRCS State Advisory Committee and IDL
- Mary Fritz, Idaho Department of Lands
- Ed Warner, Idaho Department of Lands – Forest Legacy Program

Potlatch Ranger District:

- Cindy Lane, Forest Service: Clearwater, Nez Perce/ Payette National Forests
- Jeff Handel, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
- Frank Gariglio, USDA – Natural Resource Conservation Service

Boise Attendees:

- Bob Unnash, The Nature Conservancy
- Randy David, Boise National Forest

Committee Staff Attendees:

- Jill Cobb, USDA Forest Service-IPNF and IDL, Note Taker

The plan for today is to focus on two areas: Boise River and Eastern Idaho Complex.

Progress on the Strategy Document

Steve reminded the group that we should focus on identifying existing strategies and projected needs for the next five years. He shared that in today's meeting we'll share the Strategy document outline and the proposed process for completing the document by early June. Steve introduced Tera King from Northwest Management who is being hired on contract to help package and complete the Strategy.

Dave showed the group the proposed outline for the Strategy document. He said we are thinking of having an annual statewide meeting to create an action plan to implement the strategies. There

was some discussion on how State and Private Forestry programs will be used to implement the strategy. Anyone with comments regarding the strategy outline should send those comments to Dave and Steve. A Core Team subgroup who will work together to integrate meeting notes and interviews to create the strategy document.

Proposed timeline for the Strategy Document:

April 1: Core Team will meet to review and enhance the initial draft document.

After April 1: Tera King begins editing document.

April 20th: Tera submits final draft to the Core Team.

April 20th to May 7: Core Team reviews draft document.

May 7th: All comments on draft are submitted.

May 7th to May 17th: Tera incorporates comments into draft.

Week of May 17th: Core team meets to review comments and final review of document.

May 18th: Core Team meets to review the document (9:00 to 3:30 PST). This is a key meeting to work developing the draft document to a final document. Meeting locations will be Fernan, Moscow and Boise.

June 1: Final Document is completed

Cindy Lane asked about the performance standards/measures. A smaller team will start developing the performance measures and implementation strategy prior to the April 1 meeting. The effort will be reviewed by the Core Team during the April 1 meeting. Cindy reminded us that this is a five year effort and our performance measures need to reflect that timeline. In our strategy, it is vital that we strategize how to support and encourage collaborative efforts.

Boise River:

Review of Issues: This Priority Area is an urbanized area mixed with rural landscapes. In the urban areas, the risk of future development and increasing recreational pressures is high. The risk from development and recreational pressures is especially high along Moores Creek and Payette River. Water quality is at high risk with high benefits in the Treasure Valley. Because of the urban development, there are extensive impervious areas. The wildfire risk in the foothills is a growing issue. Air quality is a highly valued beneficial use. Most of the fire risk in this area is associated with sage steppe, not with forested ecosystems.

A question was raised as to how the group will address those forested areas that receive less than 10 inches of rain per year. In the Boise area, there is minimal rainfall, though there are forested

areas above 4500 feet. IDL was asked to participate in helping restore western sage juniper ecosystems, which was tied to State and Private Forestry funding. However, because the SAFR is applying the 10 inch precipitation rule, it would have excluded the effort to restore western sage juniper ecosystems. The question remains as to whether the strategy should include juniper or sage juniper as a tree. Dave reminded us that we need to focus on the areas that our effort described as high. Steve reminded the group that we have a five year window. Cindy would like to see a footnote in the strategy to have us revisit this issue later. At this time, the sage/steppe is not a priority for restoration and won't be addressed in this Strategy.

Forest markets in the Boise Area are identified as "high benefit" in the SAFR. Regarding forest health, the primary risk for the Boise Area is associated with mountain pine beetle. Some of the Forest Supervisors have pointed out the SAFR may be understating the connection between mortality and fire risk. The fire ecologists say there are other variables that are unknown- and with our current statewide data we generally can't point succinctly to areas where the risk increases. As a strategy, they suggested more research on the relationship in targeted areas about beetles and fire risk.

Ara asked if riparian hardwood areas would be delineated in the Strategy. The response was that there would be no separate delineation for riparian forests.

Wildlife habitat in Boise River is not shown as a high benefit in the SAFR. Although, the foothills and the area near the South Fork and Moores Creek are recognized as very important for mule deer winter range. Overall wildlife diversity is not significant in the Boise area according to the assessment. There are no Threatened and Endangered species in the Boise Priority area. The Nature Conservancy is looking carefully at restoring the Sage Steppe habitat around Boise. Cindy stated that as a group, we need to clearly define if shrub steppe is on or off the discussion. The decision at this time is that while we see it as a priority, it is not the highest priority for the next five years and therefore, it is not a priority right now.

Eastern Idaho Priority Area

At 10:00, the group was joined by the following individuals:

- Rob Michelson, Ecosystem branch chief Caribou Targhee USFS
- Karen Rice, BLM
- Brent Larson, Forest Supervisor for Caribou Targhee National Forest

Steve reviewed the assessment and strategy for the folks that just joined us. While we have this group with us, we will discuss three areas in the Eastern Idaho Priority Area: 1) Teton Westslope area and includes Pocatello, 2) the Eastern Idaho Complex: located near Idaho Falls and 3) the Montana-Wyoming-Yellowstone area. Steve reminded the group that we want to identify existing

plans and strategies that may have actions planned to occur in the next five years. Steve let the folks know that we will be working up a draft that will be ready for their review by mid-April.

State assessment review of the Eastern Idaho Priority area by Dave:

Teton West slope: Our analysis shows that this area is a key piece. Within this area, there are pockets of high risk fire areas and areas of Mountain Pine Beetle threats. Wildlife, water quality and air quality are all identified as important benefits for the area. Other high priorities/risks for this area include sustainable forests, balancing recreational pressure and development pressure. Resource issues on the forest, (especially in the NE corner in MT-Wyoming corner), is to prevent invasive species from moving into Montana. The name of their effort to stop the spread of invasive species is "Hold the line". One of the species that they are most concerned about is Leafy Spurge. The Forest Service has completed an extensive mapping effort to get handle on existing populations and is working with other partners to maximize collection and use bio controls where possible. The Forest Health Insect and Disease map show that the bark beetle outbreak is epidemic in the Teton Area. Steve asked if the Forest Service had plans to address beetle spread. The Forest Service responded that they are allowing fire to play natural role and are using fire for resource benefit. They are also targeting timber harvests around summer homes to reduce fuels around those homes. That type of thinning has been extensive near Palisades' reservoir. The Forest Service is mostly treating federal lands and is trying to engage private landowners to also reduce fuels. The agency has only had mixed success because of landowner willingness.

Another forest health concern is located near the Continental Divide and focuses upon the restoration of white bark pine. Currently, the Forest Service has an extensive white bark pine restoration effort underway, but the species is threatened by bark beetles. Their plan is to continue to plant out white bark pine seedlings for at least the next five years with funds secured from a variety of sources. Currently, all six National Forests around Yellowstone are working on restoring the White Bark Pine ecosystems.

The loss of aspen is significant in the Caribou-Targhee NF. Aspen stands respond well to fire, but restoration is a challenge. The aspen has been hurt by grazing and leaf blight and older stands are dying out. Some of the stands could be completely lost because of drying conditions. The Forest Service is in partnership with the IDL and the Idaho Department of Fish and Wildlife to promote aspen restoration in eastern Idaho. The group is working on a watershed assessment in McCoy Creek to develop additional aspen restoration projects. They would like delve into some changed condition modeling to see what the future for aspen would be with and/or without restoration efforts. The leader of the Aspen Working Group is Rob Michelson. The Aspen regeneration project is broad but their current target area is McCoy Creek. When asked about opportunities with private property for aspen restoration, Rob responded that there is considerable acreage that could be restored on privately managed lands in both the Blackfoot River and Willow Creek watersheds. Another aspen restoration effort is ongoing at the Airman State Park with the help of the NRCS.

According to Karen Rice, the BLM strategies are limited because the BLM lands are scattered in this area. She mentioned some ongoing projects sponsored by the BLM that included 1) reducing fuels in the Shotgun Valley area., 2) assisting with the Henry's Lake land conservation project with the goal of maintaining migration corridors and 3) participating in the Bear Lake Area fuel treatments for both juniper and pine.

The BLM, Forest Service and a wide range of groups are collaboratively involved in the Upper Henry's Fork conservation challenge. This is an effort to identify and secure land parcels through conservation easements in the Teton Westslope area from St. Anthony north to the Idaho-Montana line. The focus of this effort is maintaining wildlife migration corridors, open spaces and working ranches. The effort covers all ownerships and is receiving funds from a number of sources.

In southeastern Idaho, and western Wyoming, there is the well organized Biomass Utilization Working Group coordination effort underway. Their goal is to capture the supply of biomass and let the timber industry know of availability. Both the Caribou Targhee and Bridger Teton National Forests are working with the group. The timber industry and mills have mostly closed in eastern Idaho, though according to Bob Helmer, there are still about ½ dozen small mills in that area. It was mentioned that many of the logs on the market go to the Yellowstone Log homes company out of Rigby. Is there a way that the Caribou Targhee could attract the timber industry back to eastern Idaho?

Asked about Threatened and Endangered Species, this area has Grizzly Bears, wolves and lynx. The management of the Grizzly Bear habitat falls back to the plan amendment from two or three years ago and all agencies are following the Recovery Plan for Grizzly Bears. Additionally, the agencies adhere to the Northern Lynx amendment for all actions in lynx habitat. The State of Idaho is managing the Gray Wolf population. Steve asked if the BLM or Forest Service focus on protection or restoration of these threatened and endangered species habitats and the agencies responded that most of their work focuses on protection. There is currently no habitat modification in Grizzly Bear core habitat, though they are thinning stands adjacent to those core areas. The Northern Rockies Lynx direction limits their thinning actions. The Forest Service is targeting those timber stands outside of the LAUs for thinning.

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is active in the area, but there are no known five year plans or statewide strategies. Rather the group looks at each project independently. We should have RMEF folks review the strategy and provide comments.

Travel Management on the Caribou Targhee is covered under a recently completed travel. The forest is in the process of implementing the travel plans, but actual road closures are not part of transportation plan.

On the lands managed by the Shoshone Bannock Tribe, they are working with a Forest Service Silviculturist on a mistletoe project. Most of their tribal lands are range dominated, though there is still quite a bit of Aspen on their lands. The name for a contact for the Shoshone Bannock Tribe is Evette Tool, the Environmental Coordinator.

Are there groups that are interested in collaborative efforts? There is a Grizzly Bear Committee that has been in place for about 25 years that has done quite a bit of work around Yellowstone.

Steve asked if there were any collaborative efforts focused upon aquatic restoration. There is extensive Yellowstone Cutthroat trout work focused on stream restoration in the Teton Area as well as fisheries restoration in Isle Park, Henry's Fork and Henry's Lake. Additionally, through the FERC relicensing, there have been fish passage projects on both the Buffalo and Chesser Rivers. In Crow Creek, a project recently completed one mile of stream channel reconstruction. Aquatic Organism Passage work (replacing undersized pipes and fish barriers) is ongoing in the area. The South Fork of the Snake River is a priority area for habitat restoration. In this area, the agencies have partnered with lots of other entities and private property owners, to correct stream diversions.

The group touched on the importance of headwater forest protection and the possible conflict with Mountain Pine beetle infestation. We need to discuss the ecological importance of riparian trees and their importance. We could have an initiative/strategy to educate people about the importance of riparian trees. The NRCS does a lot of work on riparian restoration.

Are there concerns with Air Quality and Smoke? Over the past five or six years, air quality has not been much of a problem, but there is a definite problem when smoke settles into valley of Jackson Hole. There is a collaborative air quality group through the Air shed Group.

A concern was raised about the loss of wildlife habitat and increasing development pressures. In the Bear Lake Area, there is a lot of big game winter range that is being lost to development and also being lost through conifer encroachment into the shrub dominated habitat types. How do you stop the loss of this habitat? The prescribed burning is being used to limit the conifer encroachment, but development pressure remains a problem. The development problem has slowed but it will stay a constant problem.

From the BLM perspective, in the northern polygon, they have a strong river management program in the South Fork and Snake Rivers. The BLM is concerned about balancing recreational opportunities and maintaining water quality. There is a second land conservation program on the South Fork and Henry's Fork to conserve lands that is being nurtured by the Teton Regional Land Trust and Nature Conservancy. Their focus is to restore cottonwood forests along the rivers. To complement this effort, the Fish and Game and the Bureau of Recreation are adjusting flow out of Palisades dam to create new seed beds for cottonwood forests and to enhance cutthroat habitat. The group is very concerned about the noxious weed problems up and down the river, especially the spread of Tamarisk and Russian olive within the riparian corridor. The problem with tamarisks increases during periods of drought. There is a need to coordinate flushing flows between the COE and the Bureau of Reclamation because small scale management and restoration efforts are not enough. Could there be an opportunity to restore willows and other riparian species to smaller streams as well as the larger streams?

There are active working groups involved with the Total Maximum Daily Loads implementation plans. The TMDL plans are completed for the South Fork, Willow Creek and Medicine Lodge drainages. Both the Forest Service and the BLM are members of the Watershed Advisory Groups.

Is there a concern with climate change? Not much effort to date on climate change but the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee Group is working on it. The Yellowstone Coordinating Committee Group made up of governmental agencies and jointly works together to fund large scale projects within greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Forest Service is actively reducing their carbon footprints through their operations. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition is a nongovernmental group that actively challenges forest management in this area.

Another goal of the Forest Service is to allow fires to burn over expansive areas that are too large for mechanical treatments. However, the agency is not sure if the public would be receptive to resource benefit fires? Currently, the public opinion is mixed on support for the larger fires. Most people agree that it is very important to manage smoke so as to limit protests from communities.

Is there a need to establish a new collaborative group? There are always opportunities to establish collaborative groups and that is the best way to get things done. However, the group could not think of any new collaborative opportunities.

Follow Up Assignments:

Steve: Shoshone Bannock Tribe

Ree: Local conservation districts RC and D, High Country and Three rivers

Frank: NRCS districts

Ara: Rich O'Quinn with IDL.

Ed Warner: Jim Ebinoff, Contact for Yellowstone

Dave Stephenson: Urban Forestry

Steve Kimball: County Commissioners

Ree: Watershed working group

Jeff Handel : Trout Unlimited/ or other fisheries Groups: Fish and Game

Back to the BOISE Priority Area

Additional Attendees in Boise

Randy Heiman , National Forest

Kathy Geiger Hayes, ecologist on the Boise National Forest

Sharon LeBreque (Forest Supervisor Boise)

Additional Attendees Sawtooth Priority Area

Julie Thomas Public Affairs Coordinator for Sawtooth National Forest

Polly Huggins Wind River RC and D

The group reviewed the urbanization map and was asked if they considered the values to be accurate? The group responded that urban pressures are greater than what was presented because of the ongoing recreational pressure. They based the recreational pressures on ORV registration and development plans. Asked if the issues were well covered, the group said yes.

What about existing strategies and collaborative efforts? There is ongoing fire mitigation in the foothills of Boise to the north and east of Boise in the subdivisions. This area is an important priority for fire. In the Urban area, there is a coalition of agencies and planners looking at canopy analysis to reduce ozone pollutant. Ed mentioned that there is some kind of open space collaborative. Perhaps, the Idaho Conservation League would know more? Steve will ask ICL, staff member, Jonathan Oppenheimer about their interests. Dave will contact Bill Moore (RC and D coordinator).

The group was asked about dams and stream flows. The group responded that the areas between Anderson Ranch and Lucky Peak are still good riparian communities and significant recreation and ecological values. Downstream from Boise and Eagle, there is less that we could hope to accomplish. Increased tree canopy over impervious surfaces would help control storm runoff. Out in the valley, agricultural practices contribute to sediment loads. Urban tree maintenance and tree canopy enhancement are two strategies for improving water and air quality. Steve will call the IDWR, (Brian Patton) to inquire about the "Treasure Valley Aquifer Management Plan" and the "Coordinated Aquifer Management Protection". Steve will talk to someone from Ada County to find out more about those aquifer groups. To secure more BLM information Steve will contact Mike DeArmond. Dave will make contact with the BAGS/WAGS from the various Forks on the Boise.

Our data identifies noxious weeds as a problem for the Boise area. In notes supplied by Greg Servheen, he identified lots of invasive species but is not specific about extent.

Boise National Forest joined us at 1:00 pm (NIFC FS Aviation)

In Idaho there are fourteen priority areas. Steve reviewed the status of our review thus far. Steve shared the need to emphasize collaborative opportunities and identify ongoing plans

Dave summarized the Wood River, Boise and Snake River Complex:

Boise River highlights: In Urban areas, ongoing development is a threat to forest canopy, water quality and quantity. Air quality remains at non attainment status. In Boise County, there is a high risk of Mountain Pine Beetle spread and aphids. Additionally, this area is at risk because of unstable wood markets and increasing recreational pressure along the Payette River.

In the Wood River Area, there is high valued forest based markets and a heightened risk of uncharacteristic fire. Benefits for this area include wildlife biodiversity along Little Wood River, with an emphasis on big game and wildlife conservation areas. Forests in the area are threatened by the Tussock moth and mountain pine beetle. Additional concerns for this area include climate change and increased development pressure along Hwy 75.

Snake River: Most of this area gets less than 10 inches of precipitation per year. The forests in the communities are not within the natural range of variability. The Tussock Moth and uncharacteristic wildfires are both threats. There is a big game wildlife benefit along the South Fork Boise River and Snake River. According to the assessment, this area is at risk from the potential loss of forest canopy associated with increased development. Other elevated concerns include unstable forest based markets and “pockets” of areas with potentially high water benefits.

Steve asked the group if we missed anything? The Boise folks recommended that we are focusing on low elevation pine habitats where we are seeing affects to habitat to wildlife. How are the vegetation types being looked at other then wildfire risk, insect and disease? Is there a concern regarding White-headed woodpecker or wolverine? We are trying to get this information from Fish and Game. It is our hope that we will get this kind of information. We asked the Forest for a map of the “at-risk” habitats and they said that they would provide this information over the next couple of months. Additionally, the forest is coming out with a strategy to manage wildlife. They already have an aquatic strategy in place. Both the aquatic and wildlife strategies were built off of the ICEMP. We will refer to their Forest Strategies in our Strategy. The Forest is very concerned about wildlife habitat and the elevated fire risks associated with the urban interface. Addressing the increasing fire risk is the priority for the next five years on the Boise and Payette. It was suggested that in our strategy, we should provide a map of low elevation pine types and include a reference note in our state strategy on how these threatened stands can be saved. Another driving goal for the Forests is to maintain the current industrial infrastructure. The Boise NF reported that all of their strategies were available on their website. Not all of the Forests have completed their strategies. For example, the aquatic conservation strategy is ready for all three forests, but the terrestrial strategy is still in draft form for the Boise. It is important to note that these strategies only apply to National Forest System lands, but they do consider private property and the county planning efforts. The Forests are continuing to build upon the State Wildlife strategy, and they are aligning with other strategies.

Another key strategy that the Forests are working on is addressing recreation issues. There is special interest in the strategy to resolve the conflicts between carnivore species and winter recreational users.

Additionally, the Forest Service is reviewing their Travel Management rules and in that process they are addressing ATV use and potential adverse impact to aquatics and other resources.

The Forests were asked if they were looking at threats like fire and invasive species. The response was that their Forest Plans cover those topics and the plans include strategies needed to address those risks. The Forest Plans are preventative and not prescriptive.

Currently the Forests are working on comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. The intent is that over the next 4 or 5 years, the wildlife conservation strategy will be updated to include riparian wetlands and grasslands. For this effort, they are looking a midscale vegetation analysis to compare current conditions to what we had in the mid-1990s.

In terms of fire, the Boise National Forest is using Wildland fire as a tool north of Boise as well as using more prescribed fires. Still, with the use of fire, there is an elevated concern with the spread of invasive plants, especially in the lower elevations like the Boise River area. When the Forest Service uses fire, they are frequently challenged because of air quality issues.

Asked about biomass utilization, both the Boise and Payette vegetation staff participate in a collaborative group that is addressing that issue. The challenge is in providing the necessary access needed to deal with the biomass.

How about conservation strategies like easement and acquisitions? On the Forests, these are not big programs. However, the Little Wood area would be an area where they would like some conservation action.

The Payette Forest Coalition is a potential collaborator, but the Boise National Forest is only minimally involved with that group.

Asked if there are any other watershed based groups? The Forests said while there are no watershed based groups, there are some monitoring groups. These monitoring groups track listed species like bull trout and focus on stream restoration and fish access issues. One group that is especially active and helpful in monitoring is the Lava Lake Land and Livestock group. This group invests their funds into research. The groups focus is the Little Wood Area and the lead contact for the group is Mike Stevens.

Polly from the RC and D mentioned the Beaver Committee as a potential collaborator. The group meets annually and helps transport beaver with assistance from the Lava Lake Group. Lava Lake has been active for 8 to 10 years and they could be a very good potential partner to leverage funds. It was suggested by Polly, that as part of the strategy, we should check with the Gooding Conservation District (possible contact is Kerry). Polly will secure contacts.

Within the Wood River area, the local RC and D is working with the counties to develop fuel breaks.

Polly mentioned that privately managed forest Lands are hosting lots of parasites in their trees.

Sharon mentioned that the Ketchum Ranger District working on a watershed Management Plan in the Little Wood area.

The Wood River RC and D is determined to educate the folks in the subdivisions. Their challenge is to educate people about fire and all kinds of land management. Unfortunately, public interest is very low.

The Wood River Land Trust plans should be discussed. Katherine Goldberg of the Wood River Land Trust will be contacted by Polly. Steve will send Polly standard interview questions.

It was mentioned that fish restoration is ongoing through the BPA, Nez Perce and Shoshone Bannock Tribes. However all of these groups have different restoration strategies for fish and water

restoration. It was noted that BPA is a funding source for restoration. Have we coordinated with NOAA Fisheries?

Sharon suggested that we contact the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Sharon will provide Steve with a contact.

Urban Forest Needs? Polly couldn't think of any.

Polly encouraged involvement from County Commissioners. Steve will make those contacts.

In conclusion, the issues identified in the SAFR are aligned with the Forest Service issues and strategies.

Follow up Assignments

Steve will ask ICL staff member Jonathan Oppenheimer about their interests.

Dave will contact Bill Moore (RC and D coordinator

To secure more BLM information Steve will contact Mike DeArmond.

Dave will make contact with the BAGS/WAGS from the various Forks on the Boise.

Polly will secure contacts with Gooding Conservation District

Polly will contact Blaine County for key strategies.

Sharon will contact and send us information regarding the Ketchum Ranger District watershed Management Plan in the Little Wood area

Polly will contact Katherine Goldberg of the Wood River Land Trust

Steve will send Polly standard interview questions

Sharon will provide Steve with a contact for the local chapter of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Steve will make contacts with local County Commissioners